

Desperation: Navigating Our Way to Dependence

Humility: The Cultivation of Desperation

1 Peter 5:6-11

Mark Vroegop

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:6–11)

This Sunday marks the half-way point in our August sermon series on the subject of desperation. Our aim over these four weeks has been to explore how we could be a more consistently dependent people. By that, I mean how you and I could embrace a mind-set where it is more normal for us to rely on God's grace than to rely on ourselves. I also have in mind a broader application. Part of the purpose of this series is to see desperation make its way into various groups within our church, our staff, and our Elders. This is especially important as we think and pray about where the Lord is leading us.

Since 2015, when we started our church-planting initiative that we call *The Next Door Mission*, we've grown from one church to four (Fishers, Castleton, and Greenwood in addition to North Indy), and soon to be five, with the launch of a church in Pike Township. North Indy has commissioned 450 people to leave our church to start these churches. And now those churches are averaging over 800 people per week. Castleton, which was a church adoption, just moved to two services, and their attendance is double what it was last summer. Last week they had over 300 people! Fishers is on a path toward building their own facility and self-governance. And since 2015, we've deployed 23 people to the mission field with five more actively raising support.

On top of that, while North Indy has given away 450 people, our summer attendance has been up eight percent from last year. Our total giving since 2015 is up almost 1 million dollars. Since 2015, each of our Christmas offerings (Lebanon, Brookside, and India) has been over a million dollars. As is pretty typical as we come through the summer, our giving at North Indy is behind our approved budget. So, we still need you to continue to invest financially in your church and to use your gifts.

Here's the thing: We are seeing the Lord be true to His promise in 2 Corinthians 9:8 – “⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

This vision to multiply has created some desperation in us. And in order for us to continue to be a healthy, growing, sending church with an expanding family of churches, we need, 1) to see desperation as a gift and, 2) to see self-sufficiency as a huge barrier. So, we've looked at those two areas in order to help us change how we think about what it means to be desperate.

Next week we'll conclude our series by giving voice to our desperation. Both on Sunday morning and Sunday night, we'll spend time learning about and putting prayer into practice. We'll have some testimonies, some teaching, and some prayer moments. I hope you'll come back on Sunday night, not only for our prayer time, but also for a cook-out and family fellowship time.

After Labor Day we'll begin a new series on the Gospel of John, spending nine weeks just on the first eighteen verses. They are that important!

Today I want to help us see the value of cultivating desperation through humility. In the same way that self-sufficiency tends to be our default position in life for all the wrong reasons, if you are a Christian, I want you to see the importance of humility. I want you to yearn for humility to be the normal operating mindset for the believer in Jesus.

The Call of Humility

Our passage, 1 Peter 5:6-11, is a signature text in relationship to the calling of humility. It is set in the context of an extended discussion on the issue of suffering and how believers can embrace their position as exiles in the world.

It is telling that Peter would call those who are suffering and those who are fearful to a lifestyle that is marked by humility. He does this for two reasons:

- 1) Suffering has a way of clarifying our vulnerability and exposing our self-sufficiency. Some of you, I'm sure, have discovered this. You "knew" you were dependent upon God's grace; however, suffering made that dependence very clear.
- 2) The path through suffering is humility, as we learn to depend more and more on God's help. Humility is not only a discovery in suffering; it is the way through it.

Desperate moments humble us. Desperate moments create an affection for humility. That's why Peter issues this call for humility. It cultivates desperation.

In verse 6 we see this with the command to "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." What does this verse mean?

The challenge from the beginning is that humility is a familiar word, and I'm sure that we would generally agree that humility is a good thing. Do you know what it means to be humble? Some of you will immediately go to a place where you are self-deprecating, where you never receive a compliment or a gift, or where you despise yourself. That's a misapplication of the concept.

The word does mean “to be brought down, to bring low, or to be reduced in rank or status.” Paul used this word in reference to hard circumstances:

¹² *I know how **to be brought low**, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. Philippians 4:12 (ESV)*

But the word also means something more closely connected to attitude. The word can more actively mean “to make the heart small.”¹ The sense is not that one falsely creates a condition or mindset that is inaccurate. Rather, the idea is one of re-leveling or bringing something into alignment or into reality. A great example of this is Matthew 18:3-4.

³ *and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever **humbles himself like this child** is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3–4 (ESV)*

Humility is a re-leveling, helping us to see or reminding ourselves who we truly are. Just think of the moments that we find incredibly humbling or those moments where you felt humbled:

- You were top in your class in high school only to feel average in college
- You said something that revealed that you are not as smart as what you’d like people to believe
- Your kids threw a fit at Costco instead of acting out at home where no one would see
- You thought you were getting “signals” in a dating relationship only to get “friend-zoned”
- You believed that you would get chosen for the team, but you didn’t make the cut

With each of these examples, humility involves some kind of comparison. It could be what others think of you, what you think of yourself, or what you want people to think of you. The comparison could be other people’s abilities. You may have felt humbled by the decisions made by others. But there is always a standard involved with humility. By definition, it means to be brought low—but in comparison to what?

When Peter says “humble yourselves,” he immediately connects it to the mighty hand of God. So humility, in this context, is seeing ourselves in comparison to God. It means seeing myself in light of who God is, what He’s like, and what He’s done.

Biblical humility, therefore, is seeing myself in light of who God is. That’s a good starting point for a definition.

But there’s more here. The tense of the command “humble yourself” would indicate this is something we need to embrace which is already true because of what has happened to us. In other words, the command here is not to make myself something that I’m not. He’s not saying “wake yourselves up!” to those who are asleep. Rather, he’s calling them to embrace a mindset that reflects who they are.

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 747–748.

In other sermons, I've used an illustration of my high school coach telling me to "be 6'5"" when I was acting like a guard. The idea was to play up to the level of my height. But in this context, the idea is more like trying to drive down the paint and dunk over a 7-foot player. Imagine I get stuffed in that attempt, and my coach says, "Hey, Vroegop. Just be 6'5"." That's the point. Or if you are musical, imagine as an alto, trying to hit a note that should only be attempted by a soprano. Imagine your choir director saying, "Nice try. But be an alto, okay?"

Humility not only understands who God is, but it is whole-heartedly embracing that reality. The calling is not merely to intellectually affirm that God's in charge and you are not. The calling is to allow that mindset to permeate your entire orientation in life. Self-sufficiency is so dangerous because it does not live in the real world. When God allows suffering in your life, it wakes you up to what was true all along. You just tried to be something you aren't.

Humility is living under the banner that exaltation only comes from God and that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Proud, self-sufficient people make the tragic mistake of living as if that isn't true.

Therefore, cultivating humility starts by getting this thought firmly embedded in our hearts. And then we need to rehearse it over and over. This is why the gospel is the starting point. You become a Christian by God giving you a forgiveness that you could not earn, did not deserve, and could not achieve on your own. Christianity starts by humbling us, and it doesn't stop there. It changes how we see everything, especially ourselves. Tim Keller gives us this helpful summary:

True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings . . . A truly gospel-humble person is not a self-hating person or a self-loving person, but a gospel-humble person.²

But there's more to this calling. In verse 7 we see one of the main expressions of humility. In fact, I think this is the greatest way to cultivate humility and desperation: "cast your anxieties on him because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

Humility and desperation are cultivated through prayer. The word "casting" is a participle, which means it is connected to humility. It is how you humble yourself under God's mighty hand. In order to be humble, you have to cast your cares on Him, rather than trying to make it on your own.

The word "cast" doesn't mean to throw something out and pull it back in. The word means to place a burden on something else to carry it, as in Luke 19:35, when the disciples "cast" their garments on a donkey upon which Jesus rode on Palm Sunday. They transferred the garment to the donkey. The animal bore the weight of it.³ That's the same idea. In fact, it's the same word.

² Keller, Timothy. *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness* (Kindle Locations 241-242). 10Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/anxieties-to-be-cast-not-carried>

We pray when we are desperate. But we need to cultivate desperation by praying. Jerry Bridges gives an illustration of this in regard to the problem of anxiety in his book *Respectable Sins*. As it relates to a small thing like arriving late to an engagement because of travel issues, he says:

I have come to the conclusion that my anxiety is triggered not so much by a distrust in God as by an unwillingness to submit to and cheerfully accept His agenda for me. I tend to think, *Lord, it's important I arrive in time to speak at that meeting. People in charge are counting on me. What will they do if I don't arrive in time?* But I have learned to say to myself {pray}, *But God, it's your meeting. If you don't want me there, that's your business. And what the people who are counting on me to be there will do is also your business. God, I accept your agenda for this situation, whatever that may be.*⁴

Here is where some of us need to get honest. There are some of you feeling the weight of the pattern of your self-sufficiency. You've seen the bottom drop out. And you've spent so much energy trying to figure out how it happened, what went wrong, what you are going to do about it, and how to get yourself out of it. And it's time to stop. Right now. Right here. In this service. No going back. It's time to pray, "God, I'm done. I'm trusting you. I know you care for me."

You might say, "Well, I've tried that, and it didn't work." And to that I would say, "Maybe it didn't work because God's doesn't want it to work like you want it to work. Maybe He wants you to keep turning it over to Him every day because He knows what will happen if this 'thing' isn't a part of your life."

Or maybe you are not in crisis. Your response might be to realize that you need to keep seeking God's face, to keep casting your cares upon Him, because it creates the kind of God-centered humility that you so desperately need.

Maybe you need to pray this prayer in advance of the time you are so desperate you have to pray it:

*Lord, I am willing to –
Receive what you give,
Lack what you withhold,
Relinquish what you take.*⁵

The Hope of Humility

The second aspect of cultivating humility in desperation relates to the hope that is offered to those who embrace this calling. Peter is writing to people who are feeling the weight of suffering upon them. He calls them to humble themselves. And then he lists a series of statements that flow out of this previous calling. Let me highlight four.

First, beware of the devil, but he can be resisted (v. 8-9). Peter calls us to a position of spiritual watchfulness: be sober-minded; be watchful. This is the same word and concept used by Jesus in the

⁴ Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins we Tolerate*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 65.

⁵ Bridges, 75.

Garden when He begged his disciples to “watch and pray” that they not enter into temptation (Matt. 26:41). But alas, they either fell asleep or took up a sword! The devil is prowling around, seeking people who are unsuspecting.

Think about how a lion attacks a herd of antelope. He stalks and attacks the weak one at the back of the herd. So, who is the one at the back of our herd? It is not the one who knows he is weak. No! Instead, it is the one who thinks “I got this.” Satan attacks self-confident, self-assured, self-sufficient Christians.

We are to resist him with firm faith. The devil is defeated, not by believing in yourself, but by believing the promises of God. We fight by faith. Here’s how Martin Luther said it when it seemed the whole world was against him:

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God’s own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

Second, we are not alone in our struggle. Peter affirms that suffering and hardship are happening all over the world. Every Christian knows that challenge of suffering at some level. And we need to see the calling to embrace a humble, God-centered posture as something with which we help one another. We need to help one another to remain in a humble, God-seeking posture.

Third, God will help us. In the middle of hardship or difficulty, there is a temptation to think that you have to take on this battle. Verse 10 offers us the promises that, a) suffering is not forever, b) God is full of grace, c) there is an eternal purpose, and d) He will personally restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Cultivating humility means I trust that God is bigger than my suffering or my success. It means that I know I can rely upon Him. Rather than taking things into my hands or filling my heart with anxiety or anger, I can humble myself under His mighty hand. Cultivating desperation means staking my claim with God’s ability to help me.

Fourth, God will be glorified. I love what verse 11 says: “To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” What a statement. This concluding doxology looks to God’s rule and reign over a world where evil is so apparent.⁶ This is so important. You see, if you don’t love God’s glory and His reign, this statement makes no sense. But if you are a Christian, and your heart has been captured by God’s grace, this doxology resonates with your heart even when it proves costly.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 199.

The miracle of what happens to us in the gospel is that God so captivates us with His grace that we see everything differently. We see Him as supreme, not us. We see His plan as perfect, not ours. We believe His power can make a difference, not ours. We believe He's worthy of glory, not us. The gospel so transforms us that we can celebrate our weakness, our dependency, and our need.

The upside-down logic of Christianity is that we not only come to love the exaltation of God's name, but we take comfort in seeing ourselves through the lens of His "mighty hand."

Therefore, when suffering comes, we can embrace the "gaps" in life as part of God's good plan. We can trust God knows what He's doing. But there's more.

A gospel-loving heart so loves the glory of God that being desperate is actually a good thing. Knowing—for real—that I need God?! That's amazing.

Therefore, we can not only survive through suffering, we can actually cultivate a dependent heart. We can ask God even today to cultivate humility within us.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God . . . casting all your cares upon Him because He cares for you."

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